

# A View from the Field in Van, Turkey: The Case of ‘Ayanis’

Nuran Erol Isik

Department of Sociology, Izmir University of Economics, Turkey

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**Abstract** The following paper evaluates some of the sociological data collected during the field work in Van, Turkey in 2007-2009, as part of an ethno-archeological study of a village located in an area known as “Ayanis” (Agartı), previously part of the Urartian Kingdom (third and second millennium BC). The field work is exploratory and ethnographic in nature, documenting the socio-economic characteristics of the villagers, spatial patterns of inhabitants, material cultural artifacts, and belief systems and attitudes about social institutions. The village of Ayanis has become a focus for inquiry due to its geographical location and sociological characteristics as it gives important indicators to understand *a village in transition*. Thus, the data presented in this article contribute to village studies as well as village survey monograph tradition, which represent a major methodological tool as well as a tendency in rural studies in Turkey.

**Keywords** Ayanis, Van, Material Culture, Cultural Beliefs, Social Change



Map 2. A closer look at Agartı (Ayanis) on the Map

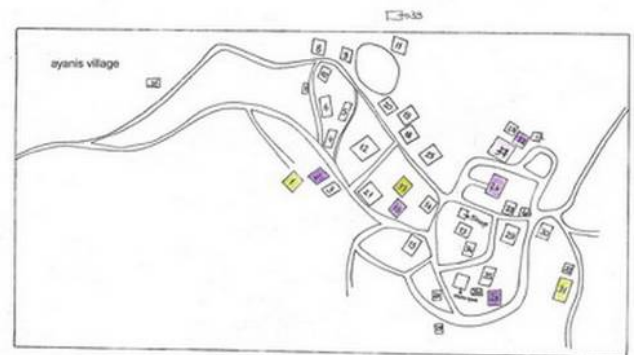


Illustration 1. The sketch of the village (The colored homes were spatially measured previously)



Map 1. Eastern Turkey, Van

## 1. Introduction

The village in which the field work was conducted in July 2009 is called Ayanis, and consists of 37 dwellings. During the field work, the researchers were able to access to 25 houses for data collection, i.e., interviews and survey research. An increasing numbers of using the houses only as summer cottages due to the harsh weather conditions in winter months. Some families live and work in the city of Van, returning to their houses in summer to cultivate their gardens and lands, and benefit from a healthier environment.

According to the accounts of the elderly villagers (interlocutors: M.E., R.K., N.K.), prior to the “Seferberlik” (Turkish Independence war of 1919-1923), Ayanis was mostly a “Turkish” or “Turkmen” village of about 60 houses, settled by of a group of Northern Iraqi Turkmen. The layout of the village is quite dispersed, with houses attached to individual orchards. These produce a variety of fruits and nuts, especially apricots, walnuts, pears (which are dried for winter consumption as well as the local market), plums, apples (mostly young trees), and less commonly, quince, mulberry, sour cherries, and white cherries. The gardens also include small vegetable plots called “kerdi” (growing tomatoes, peppers, green beans, etc.).

The village of Ayanis is also important in terms of exemplifying a *community in transition*, a process which can be understood through detailed sociological and anthropological observations. There are pieces of evidence which can support such a characterization about the village: 1) The Contact with the Archaeological Site: Picture no. 5 depicts Ayanis castle, an important archaeological site for researchers since 1970's. The research teams who came to the village and stayed there in summer months at the compound became a symbol of modern culture for villagers. During their interaction with the inhabitants, the community was affected by the excavations as an external agent, who was able to reflect on their understanding of the past<sup>1</sup>. 2) Geographical Mobility and Location: The Ayanis is located on the coastline of the Lake Van, which attracts both villagers and people from Van. Although women are not allowed to sunbath due to religious norms, families can picnic and visit relatives in the village; and some of them own summer cottages. Families visiting from the city allow the inhabitants to increase their interaction with the city, creating interaction which blends urban and traditional culture. 3) Migration: The village of Ayanis is not a closed community due to its demographic dynamics: Men frequently marry outside the village, other villages or the city of Van. In addition, as is emphasized below, the occupational characteristics and the lack of employment in agricultural sector create unpredictable and unstable employment conditions in the village, forcing people to seek work elsewhere, which is another important factor in the formation of social interaction between the city and the rural way of living.

Consequently, one of the main research questions in this article is: What are the major socio-demographic characteristics of the inhabitants in Ayanis? The lack of exploratory and descriptive data on rural communities in Eastern Turkey since 1980's was a key motivation for this project. In addition, as is emphasized below, the rural sociology studies mainly analyzed the influence of different aspects of modernization processes on village communities. The village described in this article constituted an example of the blurring characterizations of the urban/rural characterizations. Results analyzed reveal that intertwining of the urban and rural and the modern and traditional is the main characteristic of our social and cultural reality.

Therefore, the second research question regarding the cultural sphere was formulated: What are the main characteristics of their belief systems which may interfere with their attitudes about issues, and their perceptions of social institutions? In this context, in order to explore the fundamental features of the value system, it was assumed that, to understand influences on perceptions of reality, it was necessary to probe everyday practices, as well as beliefs.

The major purpose included exploring: 1) the major social-demographic characteristics of inhabitants; 2) major cultural features (i.e., material culture) which affect the ways in which ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ markers are intertwined; 3) attitudes to social institutions, which would influence their tendency to adopt or reject a modern world view.

## 2. The Boundaries of the Field Research

The sub-areas of sociology known as rural sociology and sociology of social change have a long history in Turkish social research tradition. After the 1960's and 1970's, massive migration from rural areas to urban centers motivated sociologists to investigate the causes of migration, as well as the social structural characteristics of the rural areas. A series of researchers took a modernization perspective to the study of villages in rural areas *in transition* (9, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 5, 10). Rural monographies were gathered by several researchers so as to understand basic characteristics of rural areas, creating a well-defined laboratory for investigating well known modern dualities, such as development vs. underdevelopment and traditional vs. modern. These studies mainly focused on the ways in which changes in the agricultural production systems had an impact on problem areas such as migration, the labor market, and the social organization of village life.

After 1980's, the number of studies on rural social structures decreased, due to a reaction to the modernization approach. In addition, postmodern tendencies emphasized textual reality rather than rural and agrarian problems. The rural study tradition emphasized above made important contributions to Turkish sociology, by recognizing the social problems of villages, the need to gather data to understand social change, and by creating a sociological map for the better understanding of Turkish society. Despite the criticism from the modernization point of view, which has been investigating issues about the impact on the urban development on rural communities, there seems to be a necessity to explore very basic sociological features of the village life in different regions. Village studies in Eastern Anatolia have largely ignored the monographic characteristics of the community life, which requires longitudinal studies. The data presented in this article, however, aims at making a contribution to addressing such a gap, which remains, for various reasons. The rural/urban divide, which has been discussed above, does not necessarily require us to de-emphasize these concepts completely, because the inhabitants do employ a vocabulary of

modernization in their daily life describing certain behavioral characteristics as 'better', 'more advanced', and 'developed.' Using a balanced approach, integrates etic and emic views, requires the evaluation of attitudes to modernization theory. If we use a balanced approach integrating both emic/etic angles, we are required to evaluate various aspects of 'modernization' of their own imagination, as revealed in their discourses of everyday life.

Accordingly, the study described in this article employs a framework in which rural social structural characteristics are assumed to have an important role in understanding social change. The study aims at describing basic socio-demographic features of the inhabitants, including age, the level of education, and occupational characteristics. Another aim is to describe and create an inventory for this material culture in the everyday life of individuals, because it is accepted that material cultural items in daily use symbolize the degree of openness to modern life styles. The inventory of household possessions reflects their expectations, lifestyles, and mentalities in relation to modern way of living. When it comes to cultural values, the inhabitants were asked questions designed to shed light on belief systems, the role of social institutions in their lives, and their attitudes and expectations about social change. Thus, the research relies heavily on exploratory and descriptive approaches.

The field work was based on exploring the major social, cultural and demographic characteristics of Ayanis, (Agarti in daily language of the local inhabitants,) however, a number of obstacles were encountered<sup>ii</sup>. 1) Geographical Location: The location of the village is 35 km from central Van, which required us to stay in the village (at the compound of archaeological excavations) at times. The accessibility problem was a major obstacle due to the remoteness of the village and its dispersed housing distribution. The field-work took place two separate periods in July 2008 and July 2009. One problem was access to villagers due to the tendency of villagers to move frequently due to the demands of agricultural production. Suitable times for visits to houses were limited, because we could only talk with the head of the house in the evenings. 2) Gender: due to the strict rules relating to gender in the context, women had to be interviewed by women, and men by men.

If the researchers doubted the reliability of reports by young adult children or housewives, they needed to go back to the house to speak with the husband, or an elder. A large majority of population of Ayanis is Turkish, although some men were married to Kurdish women, thus some interviews were translated by the children who were bilingual. Since a large majority of women were reluctant to give information regarding social and demographic variables, we tended to interview their husbands, their adult children, if available. The domination of men in public sphere was very evident, as a common response was "my husband would know". Such obstacles were intensified by cultural barriers. For example, in some cases, interviewees sometimes misidentified the researchers as government officials whose job was to

provide assistance. Such misunderstandings necessitated innovative and spontaneous approaches for data collection, which was a multilayered process.

### 3. Socio-Demographic Variables

The first interview was with the *muhtar*, the elected administrative leader of the community who was fully aware of the nature of this study. He described the history of the village, as well as the major characteristics villagers' life styles. He had an important role in creating various opportunities to contact people. However, since he was known as the community leader, his depiction was inevitably in favor of the village. The organization of the field work was agreed after the researchers introduced themselves and explained their research plans.

#### 3.1. Major Variables about Demographical Features of Ayanis



Picture 1. A View from the Village

##### 3.1.1. Birth Place

More than half of the heads of the households were born in Ayanis (56%). A smaller group of these (25%) were born in different districts of the region. A very small proportion were born outside the region is not very high (6%).

##### 3.1.2. Age (The Head of the Households)

The survey reported the ages of heads of households: About 20% of these men were older than 60; 39% were between 50 and 60; around 30% were between 40 and 50 years old; only 9% of them were younger than 40.

##### 3.1.3. The Level of Education

The majority of heads of households were primary school educated (61%). A minority of this population (4%) were illiterate. Around 5% of the heads of households were had no formal education, but were literate. 8% had attended middle school; 8% high school, and 12% were university graduates.

### 3.1.4. Occupation of Heads of Households

Around 37% of these men can be classified as skilled workers. Some are retired (31%), although in part time work. Around 31% of people were unskilled workers without regular jobs or social security benefits. They often work in construction jobs in rural summer cottages, or in the central districts of Van. Others worked as farmers (12%), were retirees (8%), or worked as government officials (4%). The number of unemployed is very low, due to close solidarity among the extended family networks. Those who continue to cultivate their lands while receiving a retirement pension report that this was due to the absence of anyone else to take over the land. A minority in the village cottages were employed as government officials, commuting to the city while their wives looked after the children at home.

### 3.1.5. The Household Population

A large majority of population consists of those in a single household of 5-9 people (73%). A small minority of households (9%) can be considered to be extended families of at least 10. Households with only 1-4 people were a minority (18%). These families were part of former extended families, but separated after the family income increased. The average number of children is 3.9.

## 4. Patterns of Space

In general, the geographical and socio-cultural characteristics of the region involved keeping livestock as part of the subsistence economy (80%), rather than to engage in agricultural production (20%). The lack of industrialized agricultural production plays an important role in terms of shaping not only spatial arrangements, but also social relationships.



**Picture 2.** A Traditional House in the Village

In Ayanis, patterns and use of space in households reveal interesting characteristics. The older houses were entirely built of mud. Later, the villagers started to use adobe blocks

(48%) to build houses consisted of a few rooms. Few concrete houses (9%) are built to modern standards, others are made of briquette blocks (9%); mud (adobe) and briquette walls (9%); mud and concrete (4%); or other traditional materials (13%).



**Picture 3.** A typical barn

One of the important elements in their daily diet, tandoor, a special bread prepared from flour and water, is baked in an oven built into the houses. These tandoor wells are located in the bedrooms, where the heat was most needed. Each house had a separate section with its own rooms, next to a barn for the livestock. This section was used by the adult children of the house, as well as the guests.

When income level improved, families started building additional rooms for themselves and guests. A large living room gives access to various small rooms, some of which are used as guest rooms. Bad weather conditions sometimes prevent guests to leave the house, forcing them to spend the night at the house. In several houses, the researchers observed two entrances and two large living rooms, which were additions to the original building. (28% of the houses had more than six rooms); 24% of had 5 rooms; 19% of houses had 4 rooms; 14% had 3 rooms; only 14% had 3 rooms). Apparently, these additions were made to create separate entrances for men and women. Men are greeted by other males, whereas females welcome women and girls, who are accustomed to using a different entrance. Thus, men and women are received in separate living rooms, which is an indicator of the influence of Shafiism (a sect within Sunni Islam, dominant in Eastern Anatolia), in which space is used in a gendered way.

The spatial distribution of the houses does not vary greatly. Around 40% of the houses are 150m<sup>2</sup>; 25% are 100-150m<sup>2</sup>; and the rest are less than 100m<sup>2</sup>. As emphasized above, as families' income improved, more rooms were added to the main building. A separate kitchen is a sign of the wealth of the household. All houses included a built-in restroom. A large majority of houses have two restrooms, one outside, one inside. Around 62% of the households use solar power as a source of heating hot water.



**Picture 4.** The combination of traditional and modern architectural characteristics (solar power)

Despite the common tendency to keep livestock, not all families had a hayloft built into their house. The practice of keeping cattle and sheep for sale led to spatial re-arrangements. A large majority of houses (46%) make use of turds as fuel, due to their availability. The stove is frequently used for the heating purposes, as none of the houses have a central heating system. The storage area is usually on the ground floor. Almost all houses have a garden with different types of fruit. The most common are apricots and mulberries, which are sources of income, especially fruit dried on the roofs (Lake Van has a ‘semi-Mediterranean’ climate). Some family members reported producing more than 400 tons annually.

## 5. Material Cultural Features

The sociological significance of studying Ayanis stems from the way residents accommodate modernity while maintaining traditions. The inventory of goods listed below represents certain level of modern culture. However, their continued use of certain objects also reflects the re-producing tradition, as epitomized by religious material objects. Investigating material culture is important due to its relationship to value systems, cosmologies, beliefs, and emotions, and, more broadly, to personal and social identities (7). Possessions reflect people’s life styles as well as cultural configurations. From a social scientific point of view, as an underestimated and unknown area, the Eastern Anatolia in general, the village of Ayanis in particular, requires exploratory investigations of the fundamental features of life-styles. Village monographs usually focus on the ways in which people are positioned in the production systems; however, there seems to be a tendency to undervalue material culture as goods or things<sup>iii</sup>.

In general, the material culture of households reflects certain indicators about way of living. The following features have been observed in our field work:

The houses are simply decorated, for example, there is no hardwood or laminate flooring. Relatively few have family

photos on their walls are not too many (26%). The inventory of goods was obtained during the research in order to explore dwellers’ quality of life, as well as consumption patterns.

**Table 1.** The inventory of goods

Goods	N	% (Ownership)	Goods	N	% (Ownership)
refrigerator	25	100	television table	16	64
pressure cooker	16	66.6	tape recorder	19	76
deep fryer	2	8	Camera	5	20
small gas cylinder	16	66.6	VCD player	11	44
tea/coffee machine	1	4	Computer	4	16
radio	14	56	Wifi	1	4
microwave	1	4	dishwasher	4	16
television	24	96	Telephone	23	92
deep freeze	3	12	Kettle	19	77

Most items decorating the walls have religious connotations, and some were given as a gift from those who undertook the pilgrimage. There is a copy of Qur’an, wrapped in hand-made lace hanging on the wall in every house. Because of its sacredness as an object, the Qur’an was displayed in a place visible to everybody. There are other sacred objects, such as amulets, pictures of Mecca, and quotes from religious books, extolling prayer (83%). Framed photocopies of prayers in calligraphic form were hung on the walls, reminding the inhabitants of the importance of Muslim values.

More than half of the households possessed a range of furnishing, as well as an iron, and a sewing machine. Less than 50% of the villagers possessed other goods.

There seems to be no deprivation in terms of major home appliances, and 68% of households had second refrigerators. All but 11% had a separate room for children. Around 35% utilize inherited goods and materials inherited from their parents.

When asked about their satisfaction with the goods in their households, 13% of the respondents reporting that they possessed the essentials for living, and around 16% stated that they needed more for a reasonable standard living. 13% told the researchers that they had more than their needs. Around 40% of the household members reported having some extra household needs.

The list of goods or equipment that had not been used in the last twenty years included: old ottomans, cassette recorders, gas stoves, gas cylinder lighting, Dutch ovens, wooden butter churns, obsolete agricultural tools, hand-made rugs, oxcarts, stoves, earthenware cups, copper cups, old fashioned washtubs, and warehouses. The decline in agriculture production, due to migration of youth, led to the abandonment of tools which used to be an important part of daily life.

In general, the village life reflects combination of traditional and modern way of living. Modernity is reflected

in accessibility to modern institutions, such as education, health, and media; a certain awareness of politics, an awareness of time and space; and, most importantly, the tendency to use modern equipment in daily life. The research project did not aim at obtaining detailed data on agricultural production; yet, our observations revealed that the mountainous nature of the area limited production mainly to small scale wheat production, and horticulture. The close ties with the city center and other city districts allowed a degree of contact with modernity. The use of cars, satellite technology, and Lorries were the modern aspects of their lives. In contrast, the belief and value system represents certain barriers, limiting openness to modern values. As the interview results clearly display, religion plays an important role in daily life at the social psychological level, both in beliefs and emotions. Most women interviewed expressed positive attitudes to their children's education; however, they also said that their husbands were under pressure to discontinue their daughters' education. Therefore, the material cultural characteristics of Ayanis reveal a degree of educational mobility, and a degree of modern outlook shaped by commercial contacts with the city. Nevertheless, the value system is heavily shaped by a religious worldview, which prevents a more comprehensive adoption of modern lifestyles.

## 6. Cultural Values: Trust in Social Institutions

The field research also aimed at investigating attitudes to certain social institutions, such as family, politics, education and work; however, these attitudes were not measured via scales or other quantitative means, instead researchers asked about these social institutions in a relatively unstructured way during semi-structured interviews. As emphasized above, the location of houses, the patterns of horticultural work and domestic duties restricted the inhabitants' availability. Occasionally, the researchers participated in women's conversations outside their houses, and young men's conversations in the village, and received permission to talk with women and men at home, as long as certain conditions were met. Overall, the general impression we obtained from these conversations was of the dominant roles of religion and family in every respect of their lives.

### Interlocutors

M.B. "... the unity of family is very important; someone who leaves the group would be caught by the wolves"

M.B. "Peace is very important; members of the family should be united"

R.K. "Having a family is as important as having a jacket"  
"The mosque and the school are very important"

M.B. "Politics is not our business"

N.Ç. "Everybody is after (his/her) subsistence"

M.E. "We have no education; we do not do politics. A farmer has no business with politics"

R.K. "I do not trust anybody"

M.A. "Since we do not understand, we do not deal with politics"

R.A. "Allah would not love someone with no job"

B.Ç. "Not everything depends on money"

R.A. "Our belief is (based on) Muhammad Mustafa, we cannot trust people. If someone is well off, he would not care about you"

Working life is strongly associated with material gains, which leads to a Social Darwinist point of view. While they emphasize the significance of having faith, most interviewees also pointed out the importance of learning how to survive. Solidarity with others a key value, and expressed via a religious discourse. When asked "who do you trust most?", the majority of respondents (60%) replied "Allah", a few (16%) said family and children, and only one expressed trust in himself.

In order to investigate values and beliefs in the village, we used questions developed by the World Values Survey.

**Table 2.** Which institutions do you trust most?

Which of the following institutions do you trust?	Trust highly (%)	Trust a little (%)	I hardly trust (%)	I never trust (%)	No answer (%)
High Council of Religious Affairs	56	24	4	12	4
Army	76	16	4	4	0
School	64	28	4	4	0
Media	4	12	20	56	4
Unions	17	22	4	48	9
Police	68	20	0	12	0
State offices	20	52	20	8	0
Parliament	40	36	8	16	0
Social Security System	33	38	17	8	4
EU	26	26	22	22	4
NATO	18	27	0	41	14
UN	10	20	15	40	15
Health Care System	84	8	4	4	0
Justice System	64	16	8	12	0
Private Companies	26	34	9	22	9

The question which is about trust in social institutions was mainly answered by the head of households. As the figures reveal, the most trusted institution is the health care system. The identification of health as the most important governmental services shows its crucial role in the lives of the inhabitants. Although there is no clinic in the village, the mobile services provided by the Ministry of Health might have had a positive impact on the perception of the operation of the health care system.

The second most trusted institution is the army (76%), followed by the police (68%). Both relate to politics of security, which was dominated by the political problems of the region.

It is important to investigate villagers’ cultural values, as important indicators of social change. Studies on modernity have focused on the extent to which individuals have been able to distance themselves from traditional values, which are indicated by beliefs such as fatalism, collectivism, etc. Thus, we also asked about the attitudes to fate, tradition, and individual will, as such concepts are assumed to have major role in understanding the ambivalence of modernity at the social psychological level. Some statements were as follows:

M.B.: “Everything depends on the fate of Allah.”

R.K.: “If you have some money, you can change your fate.”

M.R.: “Everything depends on fate; however it also depends on the individual to some degree.”

N.Ç.: “When they ask the wolf about his coarse neck, he replied ‘I do everything by myself’.”

M.E.: “Believing in fate is a must of Islam.”

R.K.: “Fate never changes, Allah decides everything.”

M.A.: “I wake up in the morning and make some plans; but I cannot do anything.”

R.A.: “You make decisions about some things; whereas some other things come from Allah.”

A.Z.: “Fate is sacred.”

M.E.: “I never believe in fate; this is what makes everything (bad).”

R.C.: “Man cannot determine his fate; man can only affect his fate.” (The religious leader of the village)

A.N.: “Man has his own will; man should use his own mind.”

A.R.: “Man can have impact on fate; he has his own mind and will.”

The qualitative data indicates a clear dominance of fatalistic values over individualistic values, a pattern also observed in the quantitative data.

**Table 3.** Attitudes about Fate

Do men determine their fate? Or, does everything depend on fate?	N	%
Man determines his fate.	5	20
Everything depends on fate.	14	56
Other	6	24

The dominance of fate and fatalism derives from Islamic religious values. Those who emphasized the role of individual were those were educated to at least high school level, which indicates the significance of education. The category of ‘other’ represents individuals who are ambivalent about the eminence of fate, implying that in certain situations, the human will can influence people’s lives.

The interview questions also included a set of questions on poverty, designed to position respondents on a continuum between person blame and system blame approaches. 37 %

claimed that ‘poor people are poor because it’s their own laziness which causes their poverty’ while 33 % believe that social injustice causes poverty. A small proportion made a direct correlation between religious beliefs and poverty (13 %), stating that ‘poverty comes from Allah.’

Some statements are as follows:

M.B.: “Allah did not create our sustenance equally; if poor people did not exist, rich people could achieve nothing; if rich people did not exist, poor people could never survive.”

R.K.: “Some people become poor through their own fault.”

M.R.: “Some people end up living in poverty because of lack of education.”

N.Ç.: “Allah never likes a lazy one, neither do others.”

M.E.: “My Allah did not grant anything for some people”

R.K.: “The state makes some mistakes, but the most important mistakes are ours; we are not satisfied or content.”

M.A.: “They become poor, because they are illiterate; if they had brains, they would not become poor.”

R.A.: “If a man works hard, he will never become hungry.”

The answers given above may seem to be contradictory; however, there is a distinction between opinions regarding abstract and practical issues, which are framed differently. One approach to poverty focuses on person blame; another approach considers a more abstract concept of what is just and equal. However, this is expressed within the framework of religious markers, which makes it difficult to interpret in terms of modern values.

The interviews also included questions about their attitudes to social change, to materialistic values, to work, to leisure time, to family, etc. These issues are also related to the political culture of Ayanis which were expressed through responses such as:

M.E.: “I do not care about other people’s material gains; if someone is fond of making money, other responsibilities will fail.”

M.B.: “If we have enough material gains, there would be peace at home.”

The interviews with the inhabitants revealed that the past is understood in terms of a religious discourse that excludes all non-Muslim elements, including those from the Urartu culture.

## 7. Attitudes about Social Problems in Ayanis

Measuring attitudes to social problems and social change raises many methodological issues using survey techniques. Rather than using a series of indexes, we preferred to consider their comments about social change in relation to social problems in Ayanis, because individuals can draw attention to various social problems when expressing attitudes about positive/negative aspects of changes in their community. We asked the respondents to comment on

developments in the last ten years in their village:

M.B.: "Life is more luxurious now; it was not like this earlier; now they built asphalt roads; but some places are corroded."

R.K.: "The health care system is much better now; we have phone lines."

M.R.: "Nothing changed; everything is almost the same."

N.Ç.: "The system of transportation has improved. We have new water pipes."

M.E.: "There were ox carts in the old times; now, there are new tractors."

R.K.: "The only change is the new roads; other things never changed."

M.A.: "There was an electricity system ten years ago; but we still do not have an irrigation system for our gardens."

R.A.: "We do have an electricity system; however, we do not have enough irrigation canals."

A.C.: "There is not so much difference."

A.D.: "There are new developments about education opportunities; we have a very good road into Van."

B.R.: "The education system is much better now."

A.R.: "Technological developments make agricultural work easier. There are new improvements in the irrigation system."

D.A.: "The most important development is in education via improved transportation; our roads never close down in winter months."

B.R.: "We used to produce less than today; tractors changed everything."

D.A.: "Technological progress changed everything; now we have phones, electricity, cars."

M.E.: "Problems about infrastructure have been resolved."

M.R.: "Bank credits for agricultural production ruined everything."

When it comes to observing and reflecting on the changes in the last 10 years, villagers emphasize improvements in infrastructure (roads, irrigation canals, electricity, telephone, sanitation systems, improvement in construction technology, schooling, machinery in agriculture, etc.). They also discuss the problems in agricultural production, livestock production, and accessing the local community leaders. Those who have stronger connection to the city are more critical about social problems and resources. Temporary residents are less likely to accept purely technological improvements as a sign of real progress, since they are more aware of the current developments, i.e. they can compare the opportunities in a small village and the city.

On the other hand, concepts such as progress, modernization, and development have generally been considered in terms of technological developments in Turkish society, rather than in terms of modern values, or modes of thinking. The emphasis has been on possessing phones, accessing technology, and other opportunities, which considered representing involvement in a changing world.

## 8. Conclusions

The research was conducted in Ayanis, a village situated between the eastern shore of Lake Van and a semi-mountainous area. The major research questions were based on the need to discover not only cultural values, but also socio-demographic variables. The exploratory research was designed based on the villagers' values which have been impacted by the variables on social change, such as migration, the geographical location of the village, the contact with the archaeological teams as well as the historical Ayanis castle, which is a symbolic representation of the past. Due to the reasons emphasized above, the study does not claim to investigate all exogenous and endogenous variables about social change in the village. Therefore, the collection of demographic and sociological data is an innovative approach which has revealed the basic characteristics of the village.



Picture 5. Ayanis Castle

To some extent, the nearby archaeological excavations functioned as a window of change for the villagers, as they were able to observe archaeological teams working in their camps, and their children were recruited as part time workers. The research was intended to draw a descriptive picture of the village, although there were difficult unexplorable spheres due to the limitations which affected the ethnographic study. The research started by focusing on the basic question of social and demographic characteristics, followed by an investigation of material cultural features as an indicator of the quality of life as well as the resources of the villagers. The inter-ethnic marriage patterns, migration, the frequency of interaction with the city all contributed to exposure to modern markers. These markers and indicators were explored in a way that led the foundation for more detailed and analytical projects in the future.

To this end, in order to answer questions, we decided to collect data from the village on socio-demographic characteristics, material cultural characteristics, cultural values, and attitudes to social institutions, and social problems. Discussions about traditional/modern values

always involve a degree of self-reflection. The interlocutors in the field study shared different stories which although providing partial answers, helped us to understand the ways in which rural transformation involve ambivalent characteristics.

Some descriptive statistics have been used to list the major demographic characteristics. Those who live in the village in summer months only have higher levels of education, income, and greater access to resources. The permanent residents are those villagers engaged in agriculture, which indicates remoteness from activities in the process of industrialization. According to the accounts of the villagers, due to the lack of labor caused by migration to the city, the significance of agriculture has decreased in the last twenty years.

The qualitative and quantitative data described above do not reveal particularly a well-defined view of how social change had an impact on the psyche of inhabitants. However, the spontaneous conversations with the inhabitants indicate that cultural value system had been much more open-minded and flexible in 1970's, possibly because of the greater role of agriculture in their lives in this period. They also told the researchers that the local religious leader appointed by the government was a much more tolerant "imam" compared to today's religious leader in the village. The space does not allow us to fully evaluate the declining role of agriculture, a process called de-agrarianization; however, the most distinctive variable is migration to the big cities, and the loss of importance given to agricultural work by the younger generations. A large majority of working men abandoned agriculture to become semi-skilled workers, leading to a significant fall in agricultural production.

One of the most important social institutions in the life of people in the village is religion. The values of Shafi sect have affected villagers' everyday life experiences and expectations in a gendered way. Old patrimonial structures still exist in extended families, where it is not unusual for grandfathers to be heads of households. In one of the interviews, an 82 years old man (R.T) described the old times of the village. During the interview, the interlocutor and his grandson sat us, while his granddaughters and his daughter-in-law remained standing after they had served a traditional cold drink, *ayran*, made with yogurt and cold water. To explain this, the old man stated "that's our tradition", referring to the system of separating men and women in both (private and public) spheres (*haremlik – selamlık*). As is emphasized above, the spaces are designed in such a way to prevent women with male guests. These examples are the indicators of traditional values, which draw on values, derived from earlier times obstructing the influence of the changing world. Another dialogue with a group of women revealed that everyday rituals for most women were more open and relaxed twenty or thirty years ago. They noted that the limitations on the everyday lives of women emerged 1980's, after the appointment of an imam (local religious leader) whose preaching reflected more conservative values. The imam and his wife seem to have

been involved in instigating gender segregated meetings. According to women we talked with, pious practices have made every day more scrutinized and regulated.

These characteristics also explain the recent dominance of religious discourses over secular interpretations, which are considered as immoral. Some women's perception of the role and the weight of religion in their daily life clearly reflect an intrinsic aspiration for modernization. In addition, the researchers did not try to impose a particular vocabulary in their dialogues with the inhabitants. On the contrary, some inhabitants revealed that, a contrast between the present and the past, implying a normative attitude about the disappearance of more tolerant religious culture. On the other hand, other interviewees implied criticisms about working women in general, including references to the female researchers themselves. These participants' condescending claims about modern life, and women who are 'forced to work', reveal that the distinction between traditional and modern values is blurred, even in a rural setting like Ayanis. Once again, the ambivalences of modernity a la Bauman can be observed via dynamics of cultural values, attitudes about social institutions, and self-evaluation of individuals in different contexts.

The city of Van itself has both semi-traditional and semi-modern characteristics. The village we studied has a cultural significance which derives from a long and a rich history. There has been mobility of populations based on marriage employment and, which clearly affected the cultural structure of Ayanis. What is accepted as traditional has been reformulated and reproduced on several dimensions. As is noted by many researchers (8) one of the functions of tradition in the modern world is to provide identity. The identity people attached to themselves is related to their perception of the past. For example, when asked about the Urartu Empire, or other non-Muslim elements in their history such as the Armenians, they seemed reluctant to consider a view of their past which includes different cultures. Many Ayanis residents totally ignore non-Muslim historical themes. One of the interlocutors, the *muhtar*, the local head man, shared a well-known narrative about the Ayanis Castle:

*I've seen a snake under the castle  
I have killed the snake  
There comes a girl living under the castle  
And asks someone  
Why did you kill the snake?*

Discussing the archaeological excavations and the team who occupied the compound next the castle, he started talking about this legend, which emphasizes the collective identity symbolized by the ancient castle. Rumors were circulating about the castle claiming it was affected by dark spiritual forces. There are two possible reasons for this narrative. It may have been to frighten treasure hunters looking for valuable historical remains. On the other hand, this narrative also reflects a negative attitude to the venue, which is stigmatized as an unknown or unwanted place due

to associations with the non-Turkic past. During the interviews, it was noticed that the villagers had no interest in the history of Urartu Empire, or, any other pre-Islamic aspects.

In this context, the pace of modernity is slow, due to the lack of resources and limited accessibility to other modern institutions. It cannot therefore be concluded that the impact of modernity on villages is suppressing traditional ways of life or production. Instead, the disturbances caused by rapid social change processes seem to have created new opportunities, as well as challenges their lifestyle. When the inhabitants' engagement in livestock production declined for various reasons, they sought new production areas, such as dry fruit production as a potential economic resource. When exposed to Western genres on TV, they preferred religious programs. The inventory of goods and villagers use in their houses show characteristics of both modern and traditional. The photo-copied papers, as amulets, serve as decorative objects. The intricate and relational character of cultural values, material goods, and attitudes represent a microcosm of Turkish society, and show us the necessity of conducting further ethnographic and monographic studies in order to reframe and re-analyze commonly accepted assumptions concerning people living in settings that are different from our own.

In sum, the current research offers a view which explores various different characteristics of a rural community located on the Northeastern shores of Lake Van. Its historical significance and geographical location exemplify a 'community in transition' for a number of reasons: the inter-ethnic composition in marriage practices, a cultural belief system at the intersection of a certain version of Islam and a quasi-modern understanding, a cultural memory which tends to ignore the non-Islamic past, a material culture which partially depicts the characteristics of modern consumer behavior, and, finally, a value system which reveal high levels of trust in social institutions such as religion, family, and the state. All in all, Ayanis does not have high levels of poverty; on the contrary, the agricultural resources for

almost all dwellings enable the inhabitants to avoid the fundamental problems such as hunger. The data presented in this article help us to derive Ayanis in terms of the major characteristics of such a community. The future of research projects in this area will be influenced by the search for appropriate sociological tools, in the light of the tension between different forms of social approaches.

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i The village in question was studied in July 2008 as well as July 2008. However, the duration of the research and the visits to the village on different occasions was not sufficient to present extensive ethnographic data.

ii The field work was partly executed by Dr. Caner Işık, a faculty member who specialized in folklore at the Yuzuncu Yıl University. I thank him, as well as Evrim Mayatürk, a research assistant (Yuzuncu Yıl University, Van).

iii The researchers planned to do a longitudinal study to make a sociological evaluation about the village from a social change perspective. The village survey monography was partially completed. The second part of the research project would have introduced more detailed statistical analyses and ethnographic data about the village. Also, the area where the research took place in a location in which there is very limited social scientific data. Unfortunately, after the 2011 earthquake in Van, the project had to be abandoned.